DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 291 101 CS 211 055

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TITLE Contemporary Heroes as Role Models for Oral Language Development.
PUB DATE Mar 87
NOTE 37p.; Paper presented at the Meeting of the International Oracy Convention (Norwich, Norfolk, England, March 30-April 3, 1987). Document contains light type.
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Athletes; Content Analysis; Elementary Secondary Education; *English Curriculum; Foreign Countries; Instructional Design; *Language Proficiency; Modeling (Psychology); *Oral Language; *Role Models; Speech Communication
IDENTIFIERS Australia; Heroes; *Oracy

ABSTRACT

Oral language has primacy both developmentally and by virtue of use for most individuals in our society; however, the development of oral language for many children is left to chance. Although English education journals have resounded with exhortations to teachers about the importance of encouraging children to talk, the recent limited research suggests strongly that speaking and listening activities in Years 7-10 classes have very low profile by comparison with the amount of time devoted to reading and writing activities, at least in Australia. One macro-level speech community which cuts across age, sex, and social class boundaries in Australia is sports, and an examination of the speech community inhabited by sporting "heroes" reveals the nature of the role models for young people's oral language. A study of 15 hours of video tape interviews with sports heroes yields four major classifications (expressive moments, self-reflection, decision-making considerations, and outer-directed analyses) which account for virtually all the utterances apart from social banalities and chitchat revealing startling limitations of self-observation, analysis and reflection. These interviews not only provide a model for sporting fans--of whom children and adolescents form a substantial group--they also provide a data base for the study of the products of the English education of the seventies and eighties, presenting evidence to support the need for constructive direction from curriculum designers and researchers. (A list of 15 references is appended.) (NH)

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CONTEMPORARY HEROES AS ROLE MODELS FOR ORAL LANGUAGE DEVELOMENT

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INTERNATIONAL ORACY CONVENTION

March 30 - April 3, 1987

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CONTEMPORARY HEROES AS ROLE MODELS FOR ORAL LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT

Oracy In Australia Today

Oral language has primacy, both developmentally and by virtue of use, for most individuals in our society. We spend more time in - and many of us derive more pleasure from - communicating via listening and speaking than we do from reading and writing. Yet although oral language is the dominant communication mode, at least in terms of usage, its development for very many children is left very much to chance and maturation whereas reading and writing acquisition and development is clearly formalised as a primary focus of the education process.

Significantly for us as educators and researchers there is little direct evidence, in Australia at least, about what goes on in those islands which are known as classrooms - but what little evidence there is supports the contention that reading and writing activities remain dominant (e.g., Meiers (1981); Davis and Meiers (1985)) despite the theoretical emphases since Dartmouth on the centrality and importance of talk. Some Australian states still have a system of external examinations - in which oral examinations tend to be conducted in every language except English.

Indeed the barometer of research activity also suggests, at least in that country 'down under', that reading and writing are still perceived as the paramount areas for research. Donald Graves (1981) in particular, has done his work well;the sense of the writing process as dominant is still absolute. Few in Australia have heeded the warning of the editors of Research in the Teaching of English (1984) that the product is in grave danger of being forgotten in the burgeoning of interest in the process as protagonist. Interest in oral language is also process-oriented - talk as a means to writing. The oral product seemingly lacks validity as an end in itself whereas both the writing process and the written product are totally legitimized - even institutionalized.

Historical Roots

The nexus between oracy and literacy development has, I suppose, always been a central interest and research focus for me - not only because of my concern with the development of a recognizable Australian literary tradition but also because of a very strong sense of the existence of a significant cultural cringe in Australia and an equally strong sense that such a cringe has been and is now certainly inappropriate. It is possible, of course, that the Australian tradition has always been more firmly rooted in

the written than the oral - unlike both its European heritage and its Aboriginal ancestry. While the early Australians, convicts and gaolers alike, had some kind of oral tradition in the young colony that was Botany Bay there was nevertheless an oppression of distance - what Geoffrey Blainey calls the "tyranny of distance", which militated against the nature and scope of the oral tradition as it was known in Great Britain and in Ireland and also as it was known by the nomadic tribes of aborigines who peopled certain areas of the Australian continent and whose tribes moved en bloc across its inhospitable expanses of terrain.

Australians have probably always felt a need to record their impressions in writing - a need far more pragmatically experienced than that felt by people who were not so dominated by a keenly felt and inescapable sense of geographical isolation. In Australia - even when Port Jackson was the only white settlement - it was never the case that man relied predominantly upon word of mouth. Conditions were too harsh and unpredictable to permit of that kind of comfortable narratology that provided the communicative sub-structure of English and other societies. It was also the case that the first settlers, whether sentenced to life in Australia or following government orders to establish the settlement, had a sense of accountability to the mother country which, at the official level, found necessary

expression in written forms that could be transported back across the seas to England. Even today the tyranny of distance in Australia challenges the preconceptions of the tourist, if not the ingenuities of the inhabitants.

What are the consequences of a societal structure which, at least hypothetically - and as a direct result of a geographical and demographic change of a cataclysmic nature for the early settlers - predicated a firmer reliance on written than on oral structures? Do other recently established societies have a "Clancy of the Overflow" whose epistolary talents have a special place in their folklore as Clancy does in Australia? I quote from Banjo Paterson's (1921) poem of that name:

> I have written him a letter which I had, for want of better knowledge, sent to where I met him down the Lachlan, Years ago;
> He was shearing when I knew him, so I sent the letter to him, Just on spec, addressed as follows, 'Clancy, of The Overflow.'
>
> And an answer came directed in a writing unexpected (And I think the same was written with a thumb-nail dipped In tar):
> 'Twas his shearing mate who wrote it, and verbatim I will quote it:

'Clancy's gone to Queensland droving, and we don't know
Where he are.'

Banjo Paterson Clancy Of The Overflow

I am being speculative, I know - but to what extent are Australians, in the poet **Hope's (1961) words, "unable to speak,** exhausted by the search"? What characterizes Australians as writers and speakers? If one reviews the studies across the world which have compared oral and written language production among groups of individuals, the one consistent finding is that written language tends to be briefer overall but characterized by longer words and sentences whereas spoken utterances have shorter words and sentences but tend to be longer in total length under comparable conditions. Andrew Wilkinson's (1987) spoken and written versions of the Pyrranean mountain dog story exemplified this also - the oral version was longer but less "thoughtful".

One element of my doctoral study (Davis, 1973) explored the oral and written language of adolescents (aged 14-15 years) in the Australian context. In the full flush of the Bernstein era - and what John Dixon (1987) referred to as the obsessive fear of deviating from the safely quantitative - the central concern of the study was with social class differences in speaking and in writing - of which, incidentally, virtually none were found.

With regard to male and female, low and high social class groups, however, the consistent finding was that, unlike other studies, the mean length of the written samples was significantly higher than that of the oral samples. At the time this finding, of course, ran counter to the general trend. Yet a careful review of the composition of the sample and methodology in each of the relevant studies led to the conclusion that the discrepancy in the findings was more likely to be an artefact of cultural differences than differences emanating from the sample structure or methodology of the study.

If Australian students, on average, exhibit greater fluency in writing than in speaking why might this be so? In fact we know relatively little about global speech communities in Australia. While there have been some specific studies (e.g., the work of Eisikovits (1981) with lower class girls) there has not been a significant advance on the original Delbridge (1967) classification of Australian speech into Broad Australian, General Australian, and Educated Australian.

The Listening Environment Of Young People : Role Models For Oral Language

Do Australian students have the benefit of what Gordon Wells (1987) terms "sustained oral monologue" in the classroom?

Do they have sufficient models of sustained oral monologue in their listening environment? What does characterize the listening environment of young people? Who are the role models for young people's speech? Fairly obviously role models in the home derive from family - parents and other siblings. Teachers in schools provide another source of models although one might hypothesize that their influence might well be negated by an even more potent influence from peers which may often run counter to the more formal and standard models provided by teachers within an educational context. The other source of speech models for young people is the community, both the micro community of individuals with whom a young person may interact directly and the macro community through the media, etc., which provides a much broader spectrum of possibilities.

This paper thus has as its focus one element of the oral language environment in which our students grow. There is one macro level speech community which cuts across age, sex, and social class boundaries, at least in Australia, and that is sport. Sport is omnipresent in Australia. Newsbroadcasts invariably include a sports roundup with excerpts from interviews with sporting personalities as well as commentary on recent events, etc. No other single group of people, except perhaps politicians, so dominate the air waves. Sport has such primacy in Victoria that there is even a public holiday to

celebrate the Melbourne Cup - and indeed, around Australia from Brisbane to Bunbury, from thebanks of the Derwent River in Hobart to Darwin's outer reaches, even the Federal Parliament, the entire nation stops for the ten minutes during which the Melbourne Cup is run and won. One of my Masters candidates who is exploring children's perceptions of heroes and heroines (Dalton, in preparation) found that upper primary school children are as likely to cite contemporary sporting figures as heroic as are to cite traditional heroes or heroines or even other cult figures such as pop stars.

The Speech Community Of Sporting Heroes

This study, then, takes as its focus that speech community which is inhabited by sporting "heroes" and examines the nature of the role models for oral language which they provide for young people. The sampling of speech events from this community posed some problems firstly because of the relative unpredictability of their occurrence vis à vis the opportunity to record them, and secondly, because of the possibility of a bias in selection produced by such unpredictabilities. A more neutral source of data was provided by recourse to the Sunday morning television show World Of Sport which provides a weekly round up of sporting events, interviews with sporting personalities, and a general window on the important and the trivial in sport. December-January being the Christmas

holiday/summer vacation period in Australia and a period of intensive sportingactivity on a variety of fronts (including in this 86/87 period the America's Cup challenge and defence), it was decided to record all editions of World of Sport over this five week period.

The data base thus yielded provided fifteen hours of videotape. Subsequent editing out of replays of sporting events, competitions integral to the show, etc., produced a total of 51 interview segments relating to particular sports or sporting events. Since the study was primarily concerned with sporting heroes as role models, not all of these interviews were usable as some focussed on sponsors for particular events, some were primarily concerned to interview sporting commentators about their views of particular events, and some offered little more than social chit chat amongst personalities, i.e., they lacked a focus in the sport itself e.g., chiacking a player about the wearing of a tie!

It is normally difficult to validate the influence and reputation of a programme such as this - apart from references to nebulous 'ratings' figures - but during the period of the data collection the television channel producing the program - as it had done for the past 28 years - changed hands. A month after the data collection period the channel announced that the show was to be axed. This gave rise to an unprecedented furore in the Melbourne press with the Victorian premier, John Cain,

reported as claiming that "World Of Sport [is] a Victorian institution" (The Sun, March 19, 1987, page 2) and that he "and thousands of people watch World Of Sport every Sunday. It is like a religion" [he said] (The Age, Thursday, 19 March, page 1). The Victorian Sports Minister was reported as saying that - "It [World of Sport] caused a lot of Victorians twinges of conscience because they had to decide whether to go to church [on Sunday] or stay home and watch the show" (The Sun, March 19, 1987, p. 2). One of football's great gurus, Ron Barassi, saw the programme as having "this great cult following" and commented that "It's very sad to see the end of something that touched so many people's souls" (The Sun, March 19, 1987, p.2). The religious analogies for this programme are compelling and are perhaps indicative not only of the programme's status in Victoria but of the almost religious fervour with which Australians approach sport - even as spectators.

An Overview Of The Data

As indicated earlier not all of the interviews recorded in this sample were with sporting heroes per se and hence some were excluded from the detailed analysis. The range of sports included in the sample was considerable and embraced such divergent pursuits as woodchopping, cricket, tennis, racing,golf, yachting, football, discus throwing, gridiron, volley ball, hurdling, boxing, swimming, diving, roller cycling,

sprinting, and chain saw cutting.

Those sports which yielded a substantial body of data during the sample period were tennis, racing, cricket and football so these sports inevitably provide the major data base for the analyses which follow ... although in an initial study such as this the analyses must necessarily be exploratory. Although the programme's interviews were designed to give the impression of dialogic communication their primary function, in reality, was a "display" one rather than a genuinely interactive one. The questions were highly formulaic, predictable, and gave little sense of the individual to whom they were directed. For example, "How do/did you feel about winning?". All football recruits were asked this same question by the same male interviewer: "And what about your lovely wife? If the wife's not happy with the move it's bad news for the footballer's game?". Thus because the questions were designed more as an invitation to monologue than to active dialogue, the study focusses largely on the responses of the interviewees.

Examination of the corpus of data from this speech community led to the development of four major classifications which accounted for virtually all the utterances recorded apart from social banalities and chit chat. The first classification I have called Expressive Moments after James Britton's (197)

"expressive" or language close to the self. This category encompasses sporting heroes' responses to their own moments of finest (or most recent) achievement - the winning of a race, achieving a "personal best", breaking a record, achieving a goal. The second classification, Self Reflection, includes sporting heroes' introspective and/or reflective analyses of performance within the sports psychology framework provided by Rudi Webster's (1984) text Winning Ways - In Search of Your Best Performance. The third classification termed Decision Making Considerations is fairly self explanatory - containing utterances which provide rationales for sporting career decision making. The fourth classification, Outer-Directed Analyses, was developed to describe utterances in which analyses were being made of aspects of other sports heroes' performance, career decisions and/or prospects, etc.

These classifications derive from the data and thus of course do not exhaust all the possibilities of types of utterances for this speech community. Neither should they be regarded as rigid or totally mutually exclusive as some utterances could be categorized in more than one way. For example a comment about another sports hero's performance might be interpreted as a basis for self-reflection (category 2) or it might, from the context, be perceived as a category 4 outer-directed analysis. The four categories, then, were developed as broad descriptors,

useful ways of organizing the utterances for more detailed consideration.

There is little point in attempting to provide a detailed quantitative analysis of the frequencies of utterances within each of the four classifications since this could be more a comment on the orientation of the programme's interviewers than the sporting heroes' dominant preoccupations. As a general indication, however, across all sports the dominant category was Self Reflection (43%), followed by Expressive Moments (26%) and Outer-Directed Analyses (22%), with the smallest category being Decision Making Considerations (9%); - these percentages derive from incidence within interviews rather than the dominance offocus within each interview. Football interviews were largely dominated by decision making considerations but this was largely an artefact of the time of the year of the sampling - immediately prior to the football season when there was a high profile of interest in new recruits for the various clubs. So attempts to quantify the data must necessarily be of limited significance and relevance.

Of far more interest is to examine what might loosely be termed the potency of utterances within each category in terms of the models thus provided for sporting fans - of whom children and adolescents form a substantial group. Each of the four

classifications will be described separately with an attempt to characterize any styles of speech which may be hypothesized to be idiosyncratic to each of the sports for which a body of data was sampled.

Expressive Moments

There were more expressive moments in the racing interviews than in any other single sport and these focussed not only on jockeys but also on trainers and stable personnel. What is distinctive about these interviews is their celebration of the horse which is at once adulatory and diagnostic - although more of luck than skill. Jockeys tend to perceive themselves, even in the moment of victory, as fortunate or unfortunate victims of their mounts and Lady Luck:

> Jockey A: Yes she has shown potential and with the blinkers on she was a lot better today. Yeah my confidence is up and I'm riding good horses and you know things fall into place and that was a good bit of luck today.

> Jockey B: Oh Yeah he's a pretty handy horse. His first two runs he ran fourth in 'em and he didn't have a lotta luck but he sorta brought it about hisself - a bit probably because of the fact that he drew in and uh just couldn't

capitalize on the helter skelter and uh ah well he bloody well made up for it today.

Jockey C: Yeah well he's a funny sort of a horse. He's only won three out of 38 and he was laying in pretty bad and fortunate for myself he let me know this early in the race so I was all ready when I straightened up to switch in with the left hand and he boxed on well. He sorta looked a beaten horse all the way up the straight and he just had his head in front and kept going up to the line...

Jockey D: Yeah very good effort [by Timid Miss] you know she run the mile out strongly and went to the line good. Yeah it did suit her really. There was plenty of pace on and she settled nice and was travelling very well all the way.

Trainers similarly tend to extol the horse and exhort luck but they also seem to have a broader view of jockey and horse as a unit following the brief they have given them prior to the running of the race:

Trainer A: Yes well she's always showed a bit of class. She run second in the in the guineas and she uh I think an ounce of luck she might've she could've even won the

guineas and uh her last she didn't go too well here in the oaks but the ground was cutting out and she didn't handle that but she showed her true form when she raced against the colts in the Sandown Guineas and rattled home and run a very good fourth.

Trainer B: I didn't expect him to win today uh he was he was trained up to the nice first up run but as I said to a lotta people well he's fresh and he's lovely and well - but, I said, he's not fit yet and uh his performance was really incredible as I was concerned...

Trainer C: Well he always tries. When he gets there he tries and of course he was very well ridden too ... He's a dream horse.

Trainer D: Yes Bernie um tanks very much for the congratulations and today uh he well he showed without any shadow of doubt that uh Sandown he can handle.

Trainer E: Yes.....Very consistent filly ... He rode her beautiful, didn't he? Rode her to perfection. Did exactly what I told him you know. Couldn't have done better myself, could I?

What distinguishes these utterances from both jockeys and

trainers is the heavy reliance on what might be termed formulaic judgemental pronouncements which, unlike what one might expect of language close to the self, in fact reveal very little of the personal, very little of the individual responding to an experience of triumph.

The comments of one of the America's Cup defending yachtsmen that

> It makes you very proud to be an Australian, to have all those people around you cheering and gunning for you. So it wouldn't matter how bad a day you had out there [on the water] you'd be pretty cheered up by the time you got through all that crowd...

offer much more potent evidence of an individual being moved by a sporting experience. Others, for example the winner of the Burnie Centenary Gift, seem to lack the capacity to personalize an experience which has obviously had a significant personal and financial impact on their lives in sport:

> Oh tremendous oh yeah It's the biggest thrill of my life - for sure you know winning a race like that centenary year no it was great.

Self Reflection

Rudi Webster's (1984) analyses of performance in sport and the mental activities which affect performance highlight the importance of sportspersons being able to identify the central demands of the game or sport and developing the capacity to meet these demands in the most effective way possible. He stresses the need for self-honesty and the concomitant need to undergo constant critical analysis of self, goals, techniques and skills. As I indicated before this was the classification with the highest percentage across all interviews. What were the foci of this self reflection? To what extent does the speech of this sample of sporting heroes reflect what Webster would argue are the essentials of critical analysis of performance? Webster, a specialist in sports medicine and psychology, argues that ability and skill are necessary but not a guarantee for good sports performance. His experience and research in the area lead him to stress the mental aspects of performance such as motivation, concentration, self confidence, capacity to use and withstand pressure, analytic skills.

If this sample is any indication, there is tremendous variability across individuals, across areas of sport, and maybe even across nations in the depth and breadth of analysis of performance. Take, for example, pressure - the management of

which Webster regards as critical to enhanced performance because he sees "good players" using

> ... pressure situations as challenges to lift their performances. They approach them [he says] with a positive attitude, and imagine themselves overcoming the problems in them and achieving their goals. Lesser players [on the other hand] become anxious and apprehensive under similar conditions. They approach them with a negative attitude and use their negative and disruptive thought processes as a preview for failure (Webster, 1984, p.192).

Pressure at the least complex level of sophistication in this sample is seen in reductionist terms - by a jockey, in this instance:

> ... But I said to Alan when he had that first up run last time in I thought seven furlongs would be better suited because there wouldn't be as much pressure on him.

A more sophisticated view of pressure comes from a long jumper who indicates sensitivity to context:

> ... When you went into the Olympic Games there was not much pressure because I was one of the outsiders but at the

> [Commonwealth] Games I was you know short price favourite and it is a lot of pressure because you're really competing you know for the honour of the thing but you're competing you know against nothing because if you win well everyone says well you should have won and if you get beat you're a mug ...

The deliberate application of pressure similarly operates at differing levels of complexity. In racing the application of pressure is seen most often in terms of the physical goad of the whip to spur the horse:

> ... my boss just told me to wait till I straightened up and then just go for it ... [he - the horse] started to get a bit lazy towards the finish and so had to give him a coupla blows with the whip.

The application of psychological pressure is referred to with varying levels of sophistication in other sports: for example, cricket:

> I wouldn't say sending [them] in gave [them] the advantage. The lousy way we bowled certainly gave them the advantage. I still believe that if we'd bowled well on that first day England would have been demoralized. I don't think they were in a state at that stage to have come through. We

bowled badly and let them off the hook.

And again in tennis there is the intent to apply specific pressure:

> ... in the first set I had a break at 3:2 at serving but I wasn't serving well enough. I wasn't able to um win my service games easily and put pressure on his serve and that's basically the key on grass. If you can serve well then your service game's easy and then just put pressure on the opponent, put the ball in, and maybe at 30 all take a swing at it, make a break point, you never know what is going to happen ... [you've] got to sit down and plan your strategy

or the deliberate decision to attack on all fronts:

> ... hopefully I can play as well today as I did yesterday so I'll be looking forward to playing aggressively and really taking the match to my opponent.

There were few direct comments about motivation per se although there were references to the negative effects of lack of motivation as in this reflection on what was referred to as the "dismal performance" of the Australian cricket team over the

season:

> Well I suppose you know there are moments or were moments during the year that we're starting to drop our bundle a little bit, morale a little bit low - in particular after the games in Perth where you know we lost that game against Pakistan where we probably should have won and uh you know there were sort of sorta down moments but you know the boys kept hanging in there and you know sorta all the hard work bore fruit yesterday.

Retrospective analyses of performance were more common, for example:

> I was really pleased with '86 because I achieved everything I set out to - all the goals I did - but now I've set more goals for '87 ... (sprinter)

> Well we finished sixth and you could never be happy with that but I suppose we were really struggling early and although we finished sixth we were really only a percentage away from fourth spot ... We thought we were as good as anyone else so that means we're within coo-ee of the best sides... (football coach)

Yeah it was a good win. He probably worked a bit hard from the 600 but I think he once he pulled him out three wide he just got a little bit lost you know. He's still a very green sort of horse and he's taken a long time to learn but he's winning while he's learning anyway. (stable foreman)

Oh well every time you win a race you say it about horses but I do think that this horse will find a few lengths improvement because he's still a little bit inclined to be a bit foalish. Even there today - I just watched the replay - and uh even though he was travelling easy he tended to want to sorta stargaze and lead wrong. (jockey)

... I think that little stint I had overseas has done myself the world of good um and I think - you're quite right - it's now I've matured - and you've known me since I was quite a young fellow - but I'm doing something that I love and um I'm very fortunate I think I've got I've got a lot of friends in racing .... and really I'm just so proud of what I'm doing and you know it's great to hear from people like yourself to be able to hear words like that about me... (jockey)

What characterizes these reflections upon performance, apart from a general sense of satisfaction, is the relative paucity of probing analysis - the lack of evidence of any capacity to

introspect about their performance with a view to honing their coping strategies. There is little evidence of self-questioning about crucial aspects of performance like concentration, technical skill, teamwork, ability to use pressureconstructively etc. The language of self-congratulation tends to be diffuse, imprecise, and not to lead anywhere. In Rudi Webster's terms, few of these sportspeople demonstrate that they are attempting to come to terms with the "human being" he sees as the crucial resident within the body of the athlete. Webster's credo is that there is much more to good performance than physical skill; the self reflections of this group in this sample do not reveal that they have come to this important recognition.

Other Directed Analyses

Given the relatively primitive self reflective strategies which apparently characterize this sample, it is perhaps to be expected that their analyses of others would operate in a similar way. In fact they are probably in most instances even less sophisticated than their self reflections as the following comments from various sports stars exemplify:

> ...You really realize that the young guys are really you know riding the crest of the wave and lifting on the resurgence that's really been created by the leadership of Pat Cash .... Boris has an awesome future. He's now the

number two player in the world at 19 years of age. He's got two Wimbledons under his belt .... perhaps there'll be some adjustments to be made but certainly Boris has got an exciting future but the kid from North Ringwood - Patrick Cash - that's the one we're looking at and excited about because even Boris admitted that when it comes to competing and doing everything to win there was only one guy he felt could do it and that was Pat Cash in the same way.
So Boris is already responding to the Cash threat ... (tennis player)

Craig's got enormous potential and I think he'll be an enormous asset ... he's a real find for sure (football player)

Yeah no Mike's shaping up real well but he's a fantastic footballer. He's really going to sort of brighten up the lives of a lot of Richmond supporters I think because he's fantastic to watch (football player)

Yes he's a you know he's a very versatile horse this horse - he uh He placed at weight for age and to win a Melbourne Cup you know it just shows he can go from you know one extreme to the other (jockey)

There is a tendency to resort to superlatives which are not directly substantiated by evidence; there are assertions of skill but very little attempt to analyse how that operates or to consider possible implications for their own performance.

There were other comments, however, which attempted a comparison of skills, of strategies and which imply a more analytic framework:

> Her technique is not very good whereas my technique perhaps is a little bit better and if I can get down in my times in the 400 I should be more competitive as well ... (sprinter)

> I found him a very tough customer ... The outstanding feature about him was the way he returned serve and he was really making a mess of my first serve and second serve, especially my second serve - and I kind of went with the same tactics and he really made a mess of me and was just way too good as it turned out ... (tennis player)

> She's playing her best tennis I've ever seen her play on grass. I respect all facets of her game. She's got a very good passing shot. She's extremely quick. Her serve is improved - still her second is attackable. She volleys. She doesn't really have any grand weaknesses and I can't say she has any one that scares the living hec out of me. If

there's one thing that scares me it's probably just her mobility ... (tennis player)

... [he's a] different tactitioner where he builds up to the end and I tend to just go full out from the beginning ... (sprinter)

Probably the interesting comparison here is between the first two and the second two reflections which, incidentally, come from the same two sports - tennis and sprinting. The first sprinter simply makes a comparative comment about technique - one being better than the other - whereas the second offers no comparative judgement but attempts to analyse essential differences in technique. A similar comment may be made about the two tennis players. The one identifies service as the problem area but is only able to reach the judgement that his opponent made "a mess" of him rather than analysing the strategic problems with his service. The other one, considering the game in prospect, is highly analytical. She identifies each of her opponent's strengths, measures her own against them, and gives every indication of a controlled mind exercising a psychological advantage by virtue of this analysis. As it happens, neither of these more analytic reflections is made by an Australian sportsperson - which may give rise to a future hypothesis about cultural differences in reflectiveness.

Decision Making Considerations

This classification, as I explained earlier, accounted for the smallest number of comments across the total sample. This is probably explicable in terms of the reality that this was a mid-season period for the majority of sports and hence not a period critical for sports career decision making. The major exception to this is football which, being in a pre-season warm-up phase, led to a number of discussions with new recruits from other states who were interviewed about their prospects and their reasons for moving interstate in pursuit of football.

The footballers' rationales are strikingly similar - even though they come from different states, are joining different teams, and are clearly different individuals:

> Ah well I guess everyone knows Hawthorn are a fairly strong side and have done pretty well over the last four years and you don't very often get an opportunity to play for a club like that and I thought I'd just grab it while I could .... tremendous you know he [coach] had a big influence on me coming over here and I had a lot of thinking to do obviously before I made the decision but Alan [coach] rang up a coupla times and uh showed a bit of interest in me and encouraged me to come over and have a go .... Yeah I think everyone obviously wants to have a go over here and uh I'd

hate to sit back and you know when I retire in a few years and say that I had the chance to go and never gave myself the opportunity so I just come over to have a go and I'm just going to see how it goes and take it from there .... obviously there's more money around here. The VFL clubs are a lot bigger and the crowds are bigger as well.

The major reason was I was extremely impressed with Collingwood - the way they went about things. They were very professional and uh that impressed me greatly .... but overall it was the opportunity to play under Matthews and I was just so impressed with the way Collingwood went about things .... I think watching Victorian football in Western Australia I think it's every person's dream to play Victorian football because that's where the mecca of football is and where the best football's played and um I think that's the main reason - the opportunity to play in the best football competition.

Oh [money] had a little bit to do with it I guess ....No that's one of the main reasons I'm over here - mainly because I've always also wanted to play in the VFL [Victorian Football League] out of the eastern states.

Prestige and financial reward appear to dominate the minds of these young men, none of whom give primacy to the sport per se. All give evidence of following a dream; there is little sense of the realityexpressed by one of the VFL coaches in another interview:

> Training starts officially on Wednesday - the post Christmas stuff. We had a fair bit of work before Christmas but you always got to be fairly careful, got to sorta get them going a bit but can't be too regimented. But from next Wednesday it'll be pretty much five sessions a week for the next six weeks - so it's a pretty heavy involvement for the boys.

This has but sampled the listening environment provided by sporting heroes.

What Role Models For Oral Language Do Sports Heroes Provide?

Obviously the data base of this sample has size and scope limitations if only because certain sports and particular individuals are popular and hence newsworthy at any one time. Moreover, as an exploratory study the sample is not sufficiently large to permit of rigorous statistical analyses - even if one wanted to do so. Yet the period of the sampling was the summer holiday period during which children and adolescents not only

have more time to watch television but are also likely to be permitted to do so more often and for longer periods of time; there is also less competition from other "favourite" programs since most top rating programmes go into recess at this time of the year.

What I am hypothesizing about sports heroes as role models for oral language, then, must be acknowledged as speculative extrapolation from a limited data base. Yet there is a definite consistency across that data base which transcends the boundaries of individuals or specific sports. The speech of Australian sporting heroes, regardless of the sport, relies very heavily on cliché - whether it is the sport specific cliché, e.g., the racing parlance of "there was plenty of pace on and she rattled home in her first up run" or the seemingly general reaction of the successful Australian sporting hero to success "it was the biggest thrill of my life you know" or "it's every person's dream to ...". Not only is the individuality of the person masked by the sameness and predictability of the clichés but it might also be argued that the capacity to be self observing (Dixon, 1987), to analyse, to introspect, to interpret performance and achievement is reduced by this tendency to resort to a narrow range of clichés.

Partly because of the reductionist nature of clichés and perhaps partly also as a result of a very significant reliance

on stop gap phrases like "you know" and "sort of", the utterances tend not to be extended and hence are limited in the degree of exploration and/or speculation attempted. This environment appears only rarely to produce examples of sustained oral monologue. Utterances tend to return the conversational ball rather than to attempt to do anything new with it - e.g., a young discuss thrower, asked why he had taken up this sport for which there was so little precedent in Australia, replied "Yeah well you know I just find it a challenge". There is little that reflects personal response and enthusiasm of the kind that was generated by four golfers - one from England, one from Wales, and two from Ulster - sharing their impressions of Australia and particular golfing greens where one of the Irish golfers glanced quizically at his very sharply presented English colleague and quipped "...the greens are faster than Robert's haircut".

Implications For The Classroom

I have examined only some aspects of one speech community and its potential as listening environment and speech role models. I plan to extend the study and to explore other important environments for young people such as pop music. Yet the kinds of analyses which I have made thus far and the hypotheses, albeit tentative and speculative, which I have shared with you today suggest certain directions for English teachers in Australia. We are now more than two decades down the

track from Dartmouth, a decade and a half from the Australian UNESCO Conference on the Teaching of English and the celebration of both of these meetings of the recognition of the centrality of talk as a potent medium of learning, of exploration, ofquestioning the self, others and the environment both local and global.

English education journals since Dartmouth have resounded with exhortations to teachers about the importance of encouraging children to talk. Many have tried to do so although as I indicated at the very outset of this paper, the recent and very limited research undertaken so far suggests strongly that speaking and listening activities in Years 7 - 10 classes have a very low profile by comparison with the amount of time devoted to reading and writing activities. The sporting heroes whose speech provided the data base for this study are, by virtue of their age, products of the English education of the seventies and eighties. Ought we to be satisfied with the limits of self observation, analysis and reflection which appear to characterize their public oral statements? Given their public success status, their often glamourous and/or glamourized profiles, and hence their potential as models for our current students' oral language, should we be satisfied? How should we respond? In 1967 Delbridge wrote in an article in the fourth issue of English in Australia that

> There is ... nothing certainly to persuade us that the tennis hero caught in the television screen in a moment of inarticulate agony ('Aw, I dunno') has to be forgiven, much less applauded for his utter inability to say simply and

> gracefully that he is very happy that his team has won the Davis Cup. There is no suggestion that teachers of speech and language ought to abdicate ... (Delbridge, 1967, p. 22).

There have been many pressures on teachers in the last 20 years in this country. They have certainly not abdicated ... but there may be justice in suggesting that they are still awaiting constructive direction from curriculum designers and researchers. It is not sufficient to simply proclaim the value of talk.

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